A Personal Record

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DONALD RICHIE

A Personal Record

Previous to the Second World War, the films of Japan were virtually unknown in the West. The fact that we now know a great deal about the Japanese cinema and Japanese film-makers is to a very large extent due to the residence in Japan, for the last fifteen years, of Ronald Richie—who has served as chief interpreter of Japanese films to the West in innumerable articles and in THE JAPANESE FILM, *which he wrote with Joseph Anderson. His experience in this role, and in his work as film critic for* THE JAPAN TIMES, *has been a unique one. Recently he spent a few months in America, and in this article he looks back on what he learned, in his years in Japan, of the films and the men who make them.*

Kurosawa and I were talking about Mizoguchi. We were sitting, alone, in the narrow, neon-lit bar of a small hotel deep in the provinces, and the barboy was sound asleep behind the counter. Though shooting began at six the next morning, Kurosawa did not want to go to bed. "I don't like to go to bed, I'm a born talker; I like talking, and I like this," and he indicated the glass of Scotch he had just refilled.

"About Mizoguchi," he continued: "People always say that his style is purely Japanese and that mine is foreign. I just don't understand that." He looked at the Scotch and I looked at him. He was perched on the bar stool and was too big for it: he is a big man, and chairs, stools, beds, are always too small for him; the blue jeans he always wears are too little; his shoes pinch and his collar binds. "It might have something to do with what we make pictures about. His central figures are always women, aren't they? And the world he describes, women, merchants, the middle-class, isn't my world at all. Women simply aren't my specialty."

He smiled when he said this, a smile like a child's, one that instantly resolved all of his features: his big nose, his large ears, the small eyes which looked lost in the large, long face. The smile became him; when Kinoshita smiles it is as though you had taken a hammer to porcelain.

"Yet, of all Japanese directors, I like Mizoguchi best, and after him, Kinoshita. It might even be nostalgia—after all I *am* Japanese, and those two create a film which is purely Japanese." He sat up, now taken with an idea: "That is what makes me so angry about the critics. Of course, they don't know anything—in Japan or elsewhere for all I know. At least, I haven't read one foreign review of anything I've done which hasn't read false meanings into it. But the Japanese critics go on and on about how Western I am. And mainly just because I do my own cutting and happen to prefer a fast tempo and am really interested in people. That's the thing about most Japanese films—they don't really give a damn about people. Then when they get done they call it 'artless simplicity' and terribly Japanese—well, that certainly isn't my way. And, of course, that is why they call me Western. That, come to think of it, is why I don't like period-films, at least not the ordinary ones."

He stood up, went behind the bar, got the Scotch, and filled his glass. "People abroad seem to like Japanese films, but I wouldn't count on it. Most Japanese films lack any real depth—

Akira Kurosawa, director of RASHOMON, SEVEN SAMURAI, IKIRU, *on platform, right; Donald Richie, center; Joseph Anderson, right. (During shooting of* KUMONOSUJO.)

all Japanese culture has this thinness. Even the poorest programmers from abroad often have depths we just don't approach. Are you sleepy?"

I said I was not. "You ought to be. Talk, talk: that's all I do. You know how I work: get the writers together and talk the script, get the actors together and talk acting, get the photographers and crew around and talk production. I spend all my life talking," and he stopped talking and looked at his Scotch. "You know a film I really enjoyed making? *Horse*, way back in 1941."

He smiled. "That was Yamamoto's production and I was only an assistant director but there is no other picture into which I put so much affection. The director is like a grand lord, and the assistant director is like a retainer secretly and hopelessly in love with the lord's wife. Oh, I loved that film—worked on it three full years."

I thought of the young Kurosawa, probably

looking much the same, probably not drinking so much. It was Hideko Takamine's first big picture, and she was just seventeen. And they fell in love—or, at least, Kurosawa fell in love. Gossip columnists never fully decided what Miss Takamine was feeling. Shortly after that she became Kinoshita's property, and shortly after that Kurosawa began a series of films which in ten years made him Japan's most famous director. She became Japan's favorite, and highest-paid, actress; he became the most expensive director in the country; they both ended up at Toho, and they never made a film together.

Now, fifteen years later, married and balding, Kurosawa poured himself another Scotch and said: "You know, one of the reasons that foreigners might like my films is that I really think of my audience as being the young Japanese. I really make my films for people in their twenties—and these kids don't know anything about Japan and Japaneseness, really. Oh, they will, in time. But not now. When they see my films, they aren't expected to know anything beforehand. With most Japanese films you have to know the whole story or it doesn't make any sense. But, I'm Japanese, all right," and he laughed. "Oh, I'm truly Japanese."

Later, in another bar, in downtown Tokyo, Yukio Mishima said: "You know who Kurosawa is like? He is like Dazai. I never liked Dazai—he stood for everything I stand against: you know, terribly intellectual, sloppy, pretentious—he was so terribly pretentious about suicide—really beat. I like Kurosawa though, maybe it is just that he looks like Dazai looked, and he is so earnest—and he *is* an intellectual. And he is so Japanese . . . you know, of course, there is nothing more Japanese than being un-Japanese about being Japanese. Look at me."

I thought of the opposing ranks: Mishima and Kurosawa and Dazai and Imai—on the other side, Kafu Nagai and Naruse and Soseki and Ozu and Kinoshita. Kinoshita, rather like Junichiro Tanizaki who began by running away to foreign lands, who read only foreign literature, and who ended up the most Japanese author in Japan. "It's the pattern," said Mishima, "Read *Some Prefer Nettles*, it's all there. That's what will happen to me; it happens to most Japanese."

It happened to Kinoshita, a small man, finely-boned, with the face of a monk, the slightly ambiguous face of the carved saints in the museum at Nara. His movements are nervous, precise, disdainful, slightly arrogant. It is easy to imagine him performing tea-ceremony, not that he ever does; rather, all of this is hidden beneath a beret and cordovan sandals. He rarely wears a necktie, usually a folded paisley scarf, tucked into a tweed jacket. One expects a pipe, but he doesn't smoke. Nor can one imagine him drinking; he has the face of refusal, a face so under control that it appears brittle, a face somewhat like that of André Gide, a trained face.

"Are you certain you won't have anything to drink?" I asked. Zenzo Matsuyama had brought him over to my house and it wasn't going at all well. He had just seen one of my films, con-

Keisuke Kinoshita, director of TWENTY-FOUR EYES *and* SONG OF NARAYAMA, *with boy actor and Zenzo Matsuyama. (During shooting of* TWENTY-FOUR EYES.)

sidered very avant-garde by the Japanese, who have seen almost no experimental film, and he was shocked but was not showing it. "No, thank you, nothing. Very interesting, that film. Very . . ." and he handled the word delicately, ". . . very sexual." Kinoshita waved his long, aesthetic, and immaculate hand in front of his face, as though to dispel the smoke from our cigarettes.

"The film was very cruel," he added, then continued: "Of course, my films attempt just the opposite. One should seek beauty in ugliness, and I would very much like to believe that the true intention of every human is goodness. Certainly one of my intentions is to revive in the hearts of the Japanese the love and goodness which is the due of every aged person." He was talking about *The Ballad of Narayama* which he had just finished.

While I listened I thought of the change which had occurred in Kinoshita. Just ten years before he had been making the most outrageous film satires Japan had ever seen, satires like *Carmen's Pure Love,* which had real teeth in them, and which put Japan's old people in their place, once and for all. Just ten years before he had run off to France, to meet his idol, René Clair. At that time he had said: "I want to live for a while in a country where no matter how poor the people are they at least have heat in the winter." When he returned, he said: "I went to France so that I could see Japan better." Much later, he said: "I feel my mission that of becoming a good Japanese director, rather than becoming a world-famous director."

I had often watched him work. It was like attending school with the director as teacher. He would call over Matsuyama, who usually wrote his scripts, or his brother, who usually wrote the music, or his sister, who was always around helping, or Hideko Takamine, whom he had made the personification of New Japan in his satires, and who was now the typical and retiring Japanese maiden in his later films. Each would receive several minutes with the teacher and I saw why this director's set at Shochiku is always called "the Kinoshita classroom." Most often he talks with Hiroshi Kusuda who is not only his best friend, but also his cameraman and, more recently, his sister's husband. Kinoshita treats their children as his own. "I am married to films," he once said: "They are my entire life."

"But, naturally," continued Kinoshita, "I do really feel that the motives for any human action are almost entirely on the animal level, that is, the stronger devouring the weaker; yet, I feel just as strongly that perfectly good intentions are behind the most ugly actions, sometimes. Most often, what is behind the ugly action is merely the brute fact of being human."

I saw him often. It was always the same, the distant, courtly bow, the cool gaze, and, very occasionally, the smile, almost a grimace, which cracked his face. I knew it was because he disapproved of me, for I had heard over and over again how my film had upset him, and for this I was sorry. Yet I could not help but think this small incident just part of a gradual withdrawal. His films became more and more just what Shochiku wanted—though ten years earlier Kinoshita was on the carpet in the front office every day. After having fearlessly castigated Japan's various feudalisms, he began to support the family-system, championed it even more firmly than did his boss, Shiro Kido, who felt about the family much the same way that Louis B. Mayer felt about the American Mother. Yet I knew he was not merely selling out, he was important enough now to direct any kind of picture he wanted to. I wondered if it was the pattern that Mishima had talked about.

"Not at all," said Matsuyama sometime later, after Kinoshita had acted as go-between in his marriage with Hideko Takamine. "He is perfectly sincere and if you looked at his early films you would find it all there. *Carmen's Pure Love* is not as satirical as all that. He is just like René Clair, in a way. From now on he will only make affirmations, like *Sous les Toits de Paris.*"

"And what about you?" I asked Matsuyama, very political, very left, very experimental, very idealistic, who had done scripts which Shochiku considered so explosive that they would not film them or, if they did, waited years; whose *The*

Human Condition landed him in trouble with the extreme right and the Foreign Office.

"Me?" asked Matsuyama, looking much younger than he was, brushing his hair to one side, smiling: "I don't know."

"Well, it's the Japanese pattern," I said: "You take up the Noh or something, and speak sharply to your wife, and simply cannot understand why your children are so un-Japanese about things."

Matsuyama smiled winningly: "Oh, I'm not so Japanese as all that."

"It's all a question of craftsmanship, so far as I am concerned," said Kozaburo Yoshimura some time later. We had accidentally met at a wedding: Susumu Hani had married actress Sachiko Hidari and the ceremony had been followed by an enormous reception at the Imperial Hotel. "Oh, my, why did I order this ice-cream, I am far too full to eat anything."

Yoshimura is a big man, fat, but fat like an elephant, all necessary. "Look," he said, "what makes anything Japanese, or anything American, or anything Eskimo? It is simply what is done with the material. The material is all the same. It is craftsmanship, pure craftsmanship."

Kosaburo Yoshimura, director of AN OSAKA STORY, *and Fujiko Yamamoto (left).*

"You don't mean that only the Japanese have craftsmanship?"

"Of course not," and he put down his spoon: "Look at Wyler. That man knows what the craft is. During the war I had to screen enemy films we'd captured. Well, in Burma we got a copy of *Wuthering Heights.* I kept running it and running it. It seemed the best-made film I'd ever seen—I was brought up on Murnau, you know. I made the most elaborate analysis of it, and kept breaking it down, trying to find out what made it work."

"Wyler would be pleased if he knew," I said.

"Oh, he knows all right, at least I think he knows. He came to Kyoto once after the war—no one knew he was here, he was on a vacation or something. And I learned that he was in Japan, and I ran down to Kyoto, and we spent the greater part of a day together. Of course, he didn't know any Japanese, and I don't know any English, and I don't think he knew I was a director. But we had a very nice day, just being together and pointing out things to each other, and I knew the English titles of most of his pictures, and so I could say them to him from time to time."

"But there is style," I said, adding: "All the critics say you are a fine craftsman but don't have any style."

"How can I," he said, "when the subject is different every time? Anyway critics are all too fond of classifying and making this director only do that kind of film."

I thought about the Japanese directors' adulation of Wyler. Yoshimura shared this with Mizoguchi and Ozu, and a very unlikely trio they made. When Kinoshita once wanted to make a point about the derivative quality of much Japanese directorship, he said: "I'm not like those directors who say: 'William Wyler tried it this way, so I think I'll have a go in the same manner.'" But then most Japanese directors admire Wyler to the exclusion of all others—though Kurosawa prefers Renoir and John Ford. I have often wondered just what Japanese directors see in Wyler. He is a consummate craftsman, but there is a mystique

about him, too. He cannot do wrong, not even *Ben-Hur*. With Yoshimura, I know, craftsmanship meant often doing the best possible job with inferior materials: immaculate cabinetwork using fumed oak.

"We've got a very poor tradition for making films," he once said. "After a thousand years, Japanese fiction still lacks dramatic construction —and naturally this reflects into the film. The Japanese novel simply never developed and scenarios are really supposed to be novelistic—more than anything else at any rate. Foreign pictures have a strong structure simply because they rise from a long and powerful fictional tradition. If you make a Japanese picture with strong dramatic elements, it always turns out revolutionary. Japanese intellectuals just don't see dramatic possibilities. Our whole trouble is that we don't really like anything new. Then there is our respect for authority and this results in blind mother love, blind respect for the male, and on and on."

Yoshimura is often considered "un-Japanese" in his actions. Because of this he had the longest assistant directorship of any major Japanese director. He and Kido were constantly arguing. "I never did fully understand why I wasn't promoted sooner. It was said that I was talkative, insincere, conceited. Even today Kido says these things about me. I thought of quitting any number of times. I was the oldest assistant director on the lot." Part of it, I knew, was his own fault. He had a chance, in 1934, to direct a short with Hideko Takamine, then a child-star. It was a comedy but Yoshimura was so taken with the theories of Pudovkin at the time that he created a fine twenty-minute montage which no one liked. But, too, a lot of his trouble came because he simply could not resist bucking the system.

"Take young Hani," he said, finishing the ice-cream, and I looked up, thinking of difficulties, knowing something about the trouble Susumu Hani was having in getting his company to let him make the kind of films he wanted.

"Now, he's a craftsman, but he is a kind of poet, too. *Horiyuji* is a fine film, and those idiot distributors have been sitting on it two years now, though I hear it has been seen abroad. You just watch him, he is going to go places—if they let him. And now he's got a good wife, too," he added.

His had been the only speech—and there had been dozens as is usual at Japanese weddings—which had said anything. A representative from Daiei—Sachiko Hidari's studio—had stood up and said he was not losing a daughter but gaining a son; a man from Iwanami—for whom Hani works—had said he was not losing a son but gaining a daughter. Yuko Mochizuki stood up, cried, and said they must not forget their old friends. Yoshimura simply said that marriage is difficult enough, but movie marriages are impossible, and they had better not try to make too many short subjects.

I had met Sachiko Hidari years before, at a *Kinema Jumpo* banquet, and it is rather typical of her that she had come alone. (At another party, just like it, Machiko Kyo brought four people to surround her, including that plain little girl in tweeds and sensible shoes without whom Miss Kyo refuses to move.) No one was paying any attention to her: it was before she had won foreign prizes and, besides, Fujiko Yamamoto, or one of the other reigning queens, was there.

We talked about *The Maid* which was then a fairly new film. I told her how much I liked her in it, and discovered that she was one of the very few Japanese who treated me—a foreigner—as an individual. To most, the foreigner is a Foreigner, though he may eventually become an American or an Englishman, but very rarely in all my years in Japan was I allowed to be a definite person, who also happened to be American and foreign.

We met fairly often after that and I discovered that she treated everyone as the person that he was. This talent—and its value is inestimable in Japan—makes her a great actress but it also accounts for her neglect. Someone like Ayoko Wakao, who away from large numbers of people is a nice, simple girl, knows just what tone to use with this person, just how much to defer, just how much not to. Sachiko Hidari

knows nothing about this—she can only treat people honestly.

And Hani, a man—I still think of him as a boy—who stutters and gets flustered in public, who, when I first met him, loved Jean Vigo more than anything else—and who had never seen a Vigo film. I think my main attraction was that I had seen *Zéro de Conduite*. He told me that he was thinking of Vigo when he made *Children Who Draw*, and Vigo would certainly have approved of *Horiyuji*, in which the director neglects every well-known aspect of this celebrated medieval complex of temples, and instead turns his camera under the eaves to show the caricatures with which twelfth-century carpenters amused themselves during their lunch-hours.

I never saw him alone with his camera (he tends to be slightly secretive) but I remember seeing him in complete conflict with the Japanese way, under circumstances which quite approximated what the director in Japan has to put up with.

He and I belonged to the only "advanced" film society in Japan (programs of art films, a retrospective of Joris Ivens, the first Japanese showing of *Les Mistons*) and decided to make an "avant garde" film ourselves. It was to be called *Tokyo, 1958* and was written, more or less, by Zenzo Matsuyama. But Matsuyama went to Europe leaving Hani in more or less complete control.

Editing the film was typical of the way films usually get made in Japan. We all sat around the studio and talked about editing, the cutters working on their table right in front of us. "Oh, this is a good scene," someone would say. "No, it's not," said another: "Let's throw it out." A third would disagree: "It's not so bad, let's cut it in half." The completed film was very confused—and I can still see Hani, exasperated but polite, rising above the growing mound of film on the floor, trying to explain how he had envisioned it, trying to justify his intentions. I felt, for the first time, kindly toward the usual Japanese film director, who botches everything he tries—and felt something like awe toward a director like Mizoguchi, or Ozu, or Kurosawa, who was so strong that, even in Japan, he would not compromise.

Once I took a bath with Toshiro Mifune, on a Kurosawa location deep in the mountains of Izu. We were in a hot-spring rock pool, up to our necks, Mifune in full make-up and a beard, and I commented on the fact that Kurosawa was so strict that he was called *tenno*, or "emperor" by his crew. Mifune said: "Oh, yes, he is strict, but that is only to give him control. That is why he checks everything. He made me do a scene ten times yesterday; and each time he was up there at the view-finder to make sure everything was all right. And after this film is in the can we won't see him for weeks. He'll be at the studio, putting it together himself. He sits on everyone, that is why we love him, I think. We all know that we are really making a *film*."

Mifune always enjoyed himself when working with Kurosawa, they talked together, drank together, fished together—because next to making films Kurosawa likes fishing best. And, with Kurosawa, Mifune was never temperamental—and he always acted. With almost any other director, he loses control of himself, he hams it up. I can still hear Kurosawa saying: "Now, now, Mifune—let's try it over again, and this time not quite so much."

I wonder about Hani—just as I wonder about directors like Kon Ichikawa and Masaki Kobayashi (and used to wonder about Yasushi Nakahira and Yasuzo Masumura—but don't any more: the former is in bondage to Nikkatsu, and the latter now seems to be doing anything that Daiei tells him to). Will he go the way of Kurosawa, or will he turn back, like Kinoshita? "You are absolutely wrong about Kinoshita, you know," said a man from Shochiku once. "He has only followed a Japanese pattern, and has returned—he is just like Ozu, and I know how much you admire Ozu." But it is not that simple. Ozu looks at the Japanese way and says that yes, alas, this is the way things are—it is this regret which makes his films great. Kinoshita, on the other hand, positively celebrates the Japanese way. In Ozu's films the old man is usually left alone, completely betrayed by a

system in which he believed; in the later Kinoshita films, the young rebel always returns home —still waiting, still loving—a sadder but wiser boy. And, of course, Kinoshita is perfectly sincere, but he is no longer in complete control of his work.

He is rather like Toyoda who seems perfectly happy turning out poor imitations of his one really great film, the 1955 *Marital Relations,* or else making the usual Toho comedies. I remember him, small, angular, energetic, sitting on a mat and taking small, excited sips of tea, while he was explaining. "When I was thirty, I was quite idealistic, thought that humans were beautiful. Then when I was forty the war came. Now I view things just from the reverse. Life can be quite ugly but somehow I can reconcile the two, beauty still exists, particularly in the younger generation. Maybe that is the reason I make films about young people now."

Toyoda is not a severe man, is extremely open, affable, very popular with actors, and is rather unselective about his own work. He reminds me of his favorite actor, Hisaya Miroshige, who seems completely incapable of evaluating his own performances. I thought him excellent in *Marital Relations.* "Oh, you did? I got a prize for it. I'm tired of that kind of role. You seen my new comedy? I am told it is very funny." Indeed, I had seen his new comedy. It was embarrassing, the way the late Harry Langdon films, and any picture of Red Skelton, are embarrassing.

I had originally won his regard by comparing him with Chaplin in *A Cat and Two Women,* one of Toyoda's best. Once he told me: "You know what I want to do? I want to take an airplane and go all around to all the countries and make a film with me as star, sort of like Chaplin around the world only different. Would foreigners like it? You are a foreigner, tell me. What would foreigners think?"

What would foreigners think? Or—the big question in the traditional Japanese mind—do they think at all? If so, they certainly cannot understand Japan. I remember a long fight with Shochiku when I kept insisting that the films of Ozu should be seen abroad. "But, Mr. Richie, he is so Japanese—no one would understand." "That is simply not true—I understand them," I said. The Shochiku man smiled: "But, of course, you have been living here so long now that your reactions are, well, are not typical."

Toei was at one point interested in me and their interest faded away when they discovered that I was, alas, not thought typical. This was, in general, the attitude of the industry toward me. When I would show up for the screening of, say, a new Naruse film (and there are so many new films in Japan, native and imported, that often five or six will be previewed at the same time), I would be greeted with: "You aren't at *Solomon and Sheba*? Everyone else is." This would be accompanied with signs of pleasure but, at the same time, there would be indications that they did not know why I had come—they usually decided that I particularly liked the heroine. When Joe Anderson and I were doing our book, we got very little help from the industry. There were exceptions, of course. Without the late Tokutaro Osawa, then head of *Eiga Hyron,* it could not have been written at all. He had a passion for the truth that is extraordinarily rare in Japanese critical circles. A short, kindly, energetic, eternally interested

Donald Richie and Toshiro Mifune on the set of KUMONOSUJO.

man, his publication was the fairest and least biased of all Japanese film journals—it no longer is. When Joe was doing the research with Mr. Osawa, they would hole up for hours together, checking references, comparing accounts—all Japanese histories of the Japanese film differ widely—and not resting until they were absolutely certain that this was the way things were.

Then there was Hisamitsu Noguchi, with Towa Film, who—more diplomatic perhaps than Osawa—managed to retain all of his standards and who, simply through love of it, helped us get stills and track down information, who was endlessly helpful with introductions, who was one of the least partisan men I have ever known, who knew film better than all of the film critics in Japan put together, who used to solemnly wipe his glasses, shake his large head, and say: "Tell me honestly now, just what are the differences between *Gate of Hell* and *Abie's Irish Rose*?"

And we got no help from the critics—though, to be sure, we did not ask for any. One of them, very *grand doyen*, the Bosley Crowther of Japan, advised me—quite seriously—not to make the companies angry. He was very benevolent, very prolific, and very dense. Almost all the critics group themselves around such paternal and intrinsically kindly leaders as these. This means that if they disagree, then all their protégés must disagree as well. There are a few independents—John McCartens who dislike because disliking is easy and because their publications encourage it; there is at least one nascent Arthur Knight, enthralled that movies can move. There are no Archer Winstens, no Vernon Youngs, no James Agees.

Of course, Japan is the country that invented payola. It is all perfectly open. In Japan the enthusiasm of the review does not differ with the size of the advertisement. But the critic who has been well taken care of by one of the companies is less apt, think the companies, to find fault with the products. This confidence is usually justified. Everyone gets presents all the time. Not only do critics often receive copies of the scripts before production is even begun, but they are kept informed as to how the project is going. Then at New Year's and mid-year they are given little reminders. If I kept all the toilet soap, towels, and desk gadgets which have been sent me, I would not have room for anything else.

Most often, perhaps because most appreciated, they give money. I did not get too much money because, after all, I was not a Japanese critic, but MGM—by far the best-run of any of the foreign film branches in Japan—bowed to the custom of the country and for years sent me ¥5000 just after the holiday season. I would always take it and then go ahead and say just what I thought. It is to MGM's credit that, unlike many Japanese companies, it did not follow the further custom of the country and write me pained letters, complaining at my lack of gratitude.

I was fortunate too that *The Japan Times* gave me complete freedom and showed complete trust. Not once did anyone on the staff suggest that I tone down a review, or boost it up. During my years there I enjoyed a liberty which is unknown in other countries. Certainly no American critic can be as candid, as honest, and as opinionated as I was allowed to be—and still keep his job.

Just how rare this attitude is in Japan is shown by my experiences with *Kinema Jumpo*, the biggest and in many ways the best film journal in Japan. Its approach to film is fundamentally serious, and it has enormous readership. One would think it powerful enough to print anything it wants. Yet it has printed some things of mine only after carefully disqualifying them by saying that this is a *blue-eyed view*, implying that the contents might therefore be disregarded. They once asked me to write a rather long article for them on what was wrong with the Japanese motion picture industry. I was told to say whatever I thought true. The Japanese press is great for this and whenever any celebrity steps out of the plane at Haneda, the first and only question to greet him is: "Please give us your impressions of Japan."

But what *Kinema Jumpo* wanted was a generally critical article ending on a note of reassurance. My article started bad and got worse. I forecast the disappearance of everything good within the industry as more and more films were

made for foreign audiences, as more and more co-productions cost more and more money and brought in less and less, and as the industry allocated its audience eventually out of existence.

I knew something was the matter when *Kinema Jumpo* invited me to supper. It was a very good supper, and over it, I was told, little by little, that they could not possibly publish my article. I said it was all true. They said that, yes, they knew that perfectly well, but it would make certain people very uncomfortable, it would cause the magazine needless embarrassment. Could I rewrite it? No? Ah, then, it was unfortunate, but . . . Perhaps another publication . . . But there wasn't any—and so the article is still unpublished.

The Japanese are multiple newspaper-readers, and usually read anything on the films. For that reason critics are influential, even when the most famous of them all dismisses *The Bridge on the River Kwai* with: "This is simply another foreign view of wartime Japanese atrocities."

Kurosawa thoroughly dislikes critics, calls them jackals because they run in packs, and I know of no director who reads what the Japanese dailies have to say. And it is true that, by and large, they say the same things. Kurosawa is too "cold" or "doesn't understand women," or, simply, "is not Japanese." Ozu is "fatalistic" and hence useless to Japan's "rising younger generation." Naruse is just plain "old-fashioned." Kinoshita, however, is showing new promise because of his "lyric sentiment." And Imai can do no wrong, he is the favorite of the intellectual bobby-soxer. He is just left enough to be "serious" about his themes, and he "speaks for the new Japan." The *Kinema Jumpo* yearly prizes, all the leading critics contributing, reflect this. Each company gets something, Ozu is given something for old times' sake, Kurosawa usually cannot be disregarded, and Imai is given first prize. I was always invited to vote but my choices were never taken seriously. The year I gave first place to Ichikawa's superb *Enjo*, one of the critics who, like all the others, had voted for the new Imai film, took me to one side, and said: "You are not being very constructive, Mr. Richie, here you choose a completely negative film about an insane boy who burned down one of Japan's national treasures, and you say you don't like this other film which is about what to do with the half-caste children. If you will forgive my saying so, I don't really believe that you are in tune with Japan—but, of course, it is only because you are a foreigner."

And maybe I am not in tune. Joe and I used to worry about this during the five years it took us to do our book. We found that our opinion often was in the minority—a minority of two. "Just remember *Rashomon*," we kept saying to each other. It had been more disregarded than disliked. The public took to it but the industry did not; Nagata himself walked out of the screening room, saying he didn't understand it. The one thing which encouraged us was that the Japanese audience seemed, at times, to agree with us. It liked Ozu, and Naruse, and it would turn out for Kurosawa—it usually liked those films which reflected something in the lives it knew.

And then there were people like Osawa and Noguchi and—even within the industry—some, though very few, like the Kawakitas. He, head of Towa and a top executive at Toho, speaking four languages fluently, understanding, a bit courtly; she, just as sympathetic, free in her opinions, knowledgeable; both of them right in the middle of the industry yet, at the same time, retaining an understanding of film and of people, business-people but also artists. People of this kind are rare—I can think of Ed Harrison and Tom Brandon—I don't know anyone comparable in Hollywood.

When our book finally came out there was absolute silence in Japan—except for the Kawakitas

Ayoko Wakao and Kenji Mizoguchi, director of UGETSU *and* STREET OF SHAME.

and Kurosawa. Then little by little foreign reviews filtered back and it became impossible to ignore it. So we were given a testimonial—Joe in absentia since he was back in America.

I didn't know most of the people there, representatives from the major companies, including one we had pilloried but who had not read the book. But Noguchi was there, serious and pleased, and the Kawakitas, making sure that all went well, taking me around from one group of critics to another. And there was Yoshimura; and Hani, wanting to get into a corner and talk *Les Quatre Cents Coups.*

I was made to make a speech and during it I wondered what they would think if I said what I thought. For, standing there, with everyone smiling and attentive, I realized something about Japan that I never had before.

And that was, that these two aspects of the country, which I loved and disliked: the insularity, the hypocrisy, the toadying, the insistence that no foreigner could ever really understand, all of which I hated; and the openness to any kind of aesthetic suggestions, the strength and determination to go on at all costs, the quiet honesty of the craftsman, the ability to think in terms of essentials, in terms of life and love and death, all of which I loved—I realized that these were the same thing, that one could not exist without the other: that Kurosawa's strength had ultimately the same basis as the critic's stubborn stupidity, that Ozu's closed vision of the tragedy of Japan sprang from the same impulse that made me Mr. Blue-Eyes.

I didn't say any of this. Instead I talked about Joe and about Mr. Osawa, and about how the book, for which we were being honored, got written, and—since all speeches in Japanese end with a summary—I was supposed to tell them what I remembered, what had seemed important, what nearly fifteen years had meant to me. And I could not think of a thing.

It was only later, after I was home and in bed, that I began remembering, and I realized then what had been important. It was Kurosawa up on the shooting platform, smiling to himself as he looked through the view-finder; it was Sachiko Hidari coming off the set almost illuminated because things had gone so well; it was Yoshimura's face when he remembered that day in Kyoto with Wyler; it was Hani stuttering with excitement when I gave him my stills from *Zéro de Conduite;* it was Kinoshita smiling when he recalled *Le Quatorze Juillet,* and Matsuyama doubled up during a showing of *The Kid;* it was the most venerable critic of them all gasping during *Potemkin.*

There wasn't anything truly Japanese about any of this, I realized: these are human emotions and nothing less. What makes it so Japanese is the pull between the two, between Imai beside himself with delight during *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and Imai pontificating on how very Japanese social-consciousness really is; Kinoshita idealizing family life in *The Lighthouse* and, in the same year, making outrageous fun of it in *Candle in the Wind;* or Gosho turning out nearly worthless programmers, yet saying: "I'm going to go on directing until I drop dead."

During the Occupation I used to be afraid that Japan would turn into a country like the Philippines, or like China. But now I saw that it never would, that the very things I fought most against in the country would keep it the way that it is. And this way it would retain what I loved, it would make possible those things I remembered best, and cherished. I remember, on a Toyoda location, watching the director as he moved about the set, then got a broom and carefully swept the vacant patch of earth he was going to use, then stopped, thought, and moved a large stone over a few feet. I remember Kinoshita alone in a dark set, sitting on a false log, looking up at the banks of blank lights and thinking. And I remember, almost fifteen years ago, when I had never seen a Japanese film and did not know a word of Japanese, driving a jeep along a country road near what I know now are the Daiei studios. We passed a group of people who, my interpreter told me, were movie people, either out for a location or else looking for food in the country. And I remember the man leading them, erect, wearing a cap and glasses and carrying a stout walking-stick, and I am certain it was Mizoguchi.